

Second-hand equipment

Q I have been given a second-hand vivarium but how can I tell if the equipment is still safe and that it is right for my pet?

A This is a question that I am frequently asked. The practice of "recycling" vivariums not only cuts down on waste but also allows younger people who are likely to have less spare cash to enter and enjoy what has to be the most rewarding hobby available!

Firstly, you should be sure that the enclosure is suitable for the species you intend to keep. Size and materials all play an important role in captive care, so research your chosen species' needs carefully, to check the vivarium will be adequate. Ensure that the doors shut securely and that any locks are effective.

Carry out a closer inspection by checking that silicone beaded seals are intact and not lifting. If the seals look worn, a thin bead of aquarium sealant will easily re-seal the fitting. You simply need to cut away the visible beading first, and then reapply a layer of sealant. Avoid general diy sealant products though, as these may contain toxic chemicals.

Always use a good reptile-safe disinfectant to wash out the entire enclosure thoroughly, both inside and out, having stripped the interior out first and discarded any old substrate. F10 products are ideal for this purpose, having been formulated for use with reptiles. Specific preventive treatment to eliminate any snake mites that may be lurking in the vivarium is also to be recommended.

Lighting concerns

Electronics can be a real worry. Any brown, heat-type discoloration of any electrical fitting is a warning. If in doubt, throw it out! Ideally, all second-hand electronics should be PAT tested to be sure of their safety. The real test is to run the system. Test the stat at differing temperatures so that you can be sure of its

efficiency, in conjunction with a thermometer. Filament-style heat lamps and ceramic heaters will either be working or not, and will not affect the health of the animal, so a simple switch on, switch off test is sufficient for them.

Second hand ultra violet (UV) lamps are a greater cause of potential concern. As we know the power or percentage of lamp that you provide to your animals can only be worked out by using information from the wild about the species that you intend to keep, and the height between lamp and animal.

UVB decreases in power as you move away from the lamp and it is also constantly decreasing as the lamp ages. It typically takes

100 hours for a lamp to burn in from new.

It is then stable for about 10 months in the case of

The only real way of being sure that a used lamp is working effectively is to test its output with a solar meter. A solar meter 6.2 will measure mws2 of UVB. In the case of a bearded dragon for instance I advise that a minimum of 100mws2 is provided at the furthest distance, rising to 250-300mws2 in the strong basking area.

Using a solar meter will instantly show you the power of the lamp and will also confirm the UV gradient that you are providing. For example, the D3+ high output T5 lamp will provide this magic number at 40-4cms (16-1.6in) from the lamp.

It is for this reason that I always advise keepers to start a new animal with a brand new lamp. When purchasing a lamp, register with the manufacturer if at all possible. At Arcadia, we offer this as a free service and will then send you a courtesy email in due course when your lamp is due for a change.

Despite the fitting methods of used vivariums, please adjust the lighting so that the animal is able to get the energy it needs from the lighting. Ideally, lamps should be fitted in the corner between the front plate above the door and the roof, and offset towards the hot end where possible.

The use of the correct reflector is essential to getting the best out of any lamp. By not using a reflector you only provide around one-third of the light and UV energy that the lamp is producing down on to the animal, and that is a lot of wasted potential!

Once you have it set up again, run the vivarium with no livestock for a full week before you pick up the animal. Any heating or other electronic issues should have become apparent during this time. Once you are sure that everything is okay, then you can introduce your new reptile here, certain that everything is functioning correctly. **John Courteney-Smith**



Test aquatic vivariums outside, in the event they may leak.

Arcadia lamps and then it starts to decrease in power very slowly, so that after the full year of use, a lamp will need to be changed.

Using a second-hand lamp is fraught with danger! You simply cannot be sure of the age of the lamp or how many hours a day that it has been used for. The more use that it has had, so the weaker it will be! All Arcadia brand lamps are perfectly fine to use for one whole year, based on a 8-10 hour photoperiod full time, but other brands have been shown to stop emitting usable amounts of energy much more quickly than this.

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